

The Persecution of the Church 19

Legion of Trajan, threw down his centurion's staff and belt and refused to serve any longer. He did so in the face of the whole army assembled to sacrifice in honour of Maximian's birthday. A similar scene took place in Spain at Calahorra, near Tar-raco, where two soldiers cast off their arms exclaiming, "We are called to serve in the shining company of angels. There Christ commands His cohorts, clothed in white, and from his lofty throne condemns your infamous gods, and you, who are the creatures of these gods, or, we should say, these ridiculous monsters." Death followed as a matter of course. Looking at the evidence with absolute impartiality, one begins to suspect that the process of clearing the Christians out of the army was clue quite as much to the fanaticism of certain Christian soldiers eager for martyrdom, as to any lust for blood on the part even of Galerius and Maximum.

But what we have to account for is the rise of a fierce anti-Christian spirit which induced Diocletian — for even Lactantius admits that he was not easily persuaded —to take active measures against the Christians. It is certainly noteworthy that about this time the only school of philosophy which was alive, active, and at all original, was definitely anti-Christian. We refer, of course, to the Neo-Platonists of Alexandria. Their principal exponent was the philosopher Porphyry, who carried on a violent anti-Christian propaganda, though he seems to have borrowed from Christianity, and more especially from the rigorously ascetic form which Christianity had assumed in Egypt, many of his leading tenets.